

And yet how could he regard life and death with such pagan eyes? Always the heroes of Plutarch, not the Bible, are his models in practice; the heathen sages, not the Fathers, his masters in theory. His book is largely an *Imitatio Socratis*, the very antithesis of *The Imitation of Christ*. He writes of being himself *ny ange ny Caton*—a juxtaposition that both Cato and the angel would have found equally surprising. Of death he speaks calmly as a half-pleasant sleep; he praises Roman suicides; in a crisis of illness he seems to have contemplated that way of escape as not impossible for himself. 'Sentiments tout paiens', groans Pascal. Could such a man believe in Hell? Certainly for repentance he has little use; he would live, he says, very much in the same way if he had his life over again. For him health is the most precious thing in the world, *un plaisir solide, charnu et moelleux*, the only object worth taking pains to win; whereas for Pascal it is a sin to desire it. True, Pascal was a religious maniac. But the Papal censors who found no fault with the *Essais* except such trifles as too frequent references to Fortune in place of Providence, or the monstrous suggestion that a heretic like Theodore Beza could be a good poet, were blind owls straining at gnats. When Montaigne put *Mon-*taigne on the *Index* under Louis XIV, she had been a century too slow in the uptake.

It is indeed an extraordinary picture of

inconsistency.

But Montaigne has given us, I think, the only answer.

Man is 'merveilleusement divers et ondoyant'. He was

a born pagan: yet he believed that he believed. In religion,

one half of his brain did not really know what the other

half thought. Reason was one thing, faith another.

Sometimes the wall between these watertight compartments

dwindles to such eggshell thinness that we cannot

believe it will hold. Yet it does. Montaigne may find it